

WASHINGTON – Congressman Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) today called on the Turkish government to "stop dragging its feet" and immediately approve safe transit for U.S. naval hospital ships bound for Georgia.

Now several days since the U.S. Administration pledged to provide humanitarian and medical assistance to hundreds of injured Georgian civilians, Turkey continues to block the USNS Mercy and the USNS Comfort from transiting the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles – the narrow Turkish Straits that connect the Mediterranean and the Black Seas.

"As hundreds of Georgian civilians cry out for international assistance, Turkey is dragging its feet on approving the transit of U.S. hospital ships through the Turkish Straits," said Congressman Kirk, a member of the House Appropriations Committee's Foreign Operations Subcommittee and Navy Reserve officer. "Blocking humanitarian and medical supplies from reaching the people of Georgia is unacceptable. We should expect more from a NATO ally like Turkey."

Under international law, vessels seeking transit through the Turkish Straits must first have permission from the Turkish government. According to news reports, the Turkish government remains "sluggish and unresponsive" in granting the U.S. passage to Georgia.

Earlier today, Kirk sent a letter to fellow members of the U.S. House of Representatives urging them to call Turkey's Ambassador to the U.S. Nabi Akensoy and demand his government's approval for the humanitarian mission.

The "Dear Colleague" letter is below.

August 18, 2008

Help the U.S. Deliver Critical Relief to Georgia  
Call on Turkey to Allow U.S. Hospital Ships through its Straits

Dear Colleague:

As thousands of Georgian civilians cry out for international assistance, Turkey is dragging its feet on approving the transit of U.S. hospital ships through the Turkish Straits.

To reach Georgia and deliver relief, the USNS Marcy and the USNS Comfort must pass through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, the narrow Turkish Straits that connect the Mediterranean

and the Black Seas. According to news reports, the Turkish government remains "sluggish and unresponsive" in granting the U.S. passage to Georgia.

We should expect more from a NATO ally like Turkey. Please join me in contacting Turkish Ambassador Nabi <sup>a</sup>ensoy, urging his government to approve safe transit for U.S. hospital ships bound for Georgia without delay. Ambassador <sup>a</sup>ensoy can be reached at (202) 612-6700.

For more information, please contact Patrick Magnuson on my staff at 5-4835.

Sincerely,

Mark Steven Kirk  
Member of Congress